



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

*Log# 539*

Date: December 5, 1989

In reply refer to: H-89-35

Mr. Robert A. Innocenzi, P. E.  
Acting Commissioner of Transportation  
New Jersey Department of Transportation  
1035 Parkway Avenue  
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

At 6:20 a.m. on December 6, 1988, a tractor-semitrailer combination operated by Island Transportation Corporation (Island) and loaded with 8,800 gallons of gasoline collided with a Consolidated Rail Corporation (Conrail) train at the Roosevelt Avenue grade crossing near Lafayette Street in Carteret, New Jersey. The truck overturned and caught fire.

The truckdriver died - - no other persons were injured. The tractor-semitrailer, a pickup truck, and two houses southwest of the crossing were destroyed in the fire. At least three other unoccupied vehicles, other buildings, one locomotive, and several vehicles parked nearby were damaged.

The National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of this accident was the conductor's failure to flag the crossing and the truckdriver's failure to stop his vehicle between 15 and 50 feet of the grade crossing as required. Contributing to the accident was the failure of the engineer to set the headlight of the locomotive facing the crossing on bright. 1/

There were no automatic train-activated warning signals at the crossing. For westbound highway vehicles, the crossing was marked with a silver-reflectORIZED railroad crossing (crossbuck) sign with black lettering located 15.5 feet from the center of the tracks and 10 feet north of the north curblinE of Roosevelt Avenue.

1/ For more detailed information, read Railroad/Highway Accident Report - - "Consolidated Rail Corporation Train Collision with Island Transportation Corporation Truck, Roosevelt Avenue near Lafayette Street, Carteret, New Jersey, December 6, 1988," (NTSB/RHR-89/01).

The westbound lane of Roosevelt Avenue was also marked with an advance railroad pavement marking about 215 feet east of the crossing. This advance marking was faded and nearly illegible. There also was no railroad advance warning sign for westbound traffic when the Safety Board examined the scene. There was a railroad pavement marking and railroad advance warning sign, but no crossbuck sign, at the crossing for eastbound traffic.

The Federal Railroad Administration/Association of American Railroads (FRA/AAR) grade crossing inventory identifies the accident crossing as number 171639B. The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) attempts to inspect all grade crossings in the State once each year. The last inspection of the accident crossing was performed on February 11, 1987, and the inspection noted the missing eastbound crossbuck and that the advance pavement markings needed repainting.

At the time of this inspection, the advance warning sign for westbound traffic was in place. Although the inspection findings were forwarded to the FRA for use in the FRA/AAR grade crossing inventory system, the NJDOT did not report the condition of the pavement markings or the fact that the eastbound crossbuck was missing to Middlesex County (New Jersey), the political subdivision in the State responsible for maintenance of the advance pavement markings and signs at the crossing.

The Safety Board concluded that although the advance pavement marking located east of the accident crossing was in extremely poor condition and the railroad advance warning sign was missing when the Safety Board examined the accident site, the truckdriver had used Roosevelt Avenue as his usual route to the entrance onto the New Jersey Turnpike since he was hired by Island in 1984. The Safety Board believes that the truckdriver was familiar with the area and knew that the crossing was there. The available evidence indicates, and the Safety Board concludes, that the poor condition of the railroad pavement marking east of the crossing and the lack of a railroad advance warning sign did not cause or contribute to this accident.

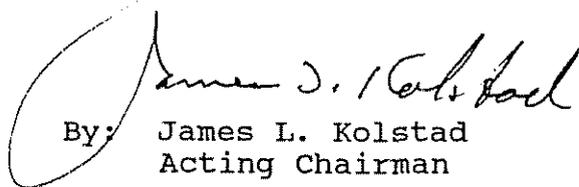
However, the Safety Board believes that the NJDOT should institute procedures to identify and notify jurisdictions responsible for the maintenance of railroad grade crossing warning signs and other devices if deficiencies are found during NJDOT inspections. Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the New Jersey Department of Transportation:

Institute procedures to identify and notify jurisdictions responsible for the maintenance of railroad grade crossing warning signs and other devices if deficiencies are found during NJDOT inspections. (Class II, Priority Action)  
(H-89-35)

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility ". . . to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any action taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, it would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation H-89-35 in your reply.

Also as a result of its investigation of this accident, the Safety Board issued safety recommendations R-89-62 through -64 to Consolidated Rail Corporation, R-89-65 to the Federal Railroad Administration, H-89-36 to the Research and Special Programs Administration, and H-89-37 to the National Tank Truck Carriers, Inc. of the American Trucking Associations.

KOLSTAD, Acting Chairman, and BURNETT, LAUBER, NALL, and DICKINSON, Members, concurred in this recommendation.

  
By: James L. Kolstad  
Acting Chairman